

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 9, 2002

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STATE PARKS NAMES TWO POTENTIAL SITES FOR OFF-LEASH DOG PILOT PROGRAM

SACRAMENTO – State Parks Director Rusty Areias today announced that the Department of Parks and Recreation has selected two potential areas for development as the first-ever enclosed off-leash dog areas in the State Parks System.

Director Areias created a task group in July 2001 to study the issue of establishing off-leash areas in state parks and come up with recommendations for sites to test the feasibility of this form of recreation. The task force group included representatives of off-leash advocacy groups, environmental organizations, California State Parks Rangers Association and staff of the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

State Parks today issued a report stemming from the task group's work, identifying potential areas for the two-year pilot program – one at Candlestick State Recreation Area in San Francisco and the other in an area of San Buenaventura State Beach near Ventura in Southern California. More extensive review would be required to determine the precise location of the enclosed off-leash area.

"The mission of State Parks is to preserve and protect the natural and cultural resources of California that have been placed in our charge," said Areias. "It also is to create opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation. This pilot project is consistent with the Department's urban strategy to make State Parks more relevant to California's growing population."

Sen. Jackie Speier, D-Hillsborough, who has led legislative efforts to secure areas for off-leash dog parks, said, "I applaud the department for its cooperative spirit. Dog owners in urban areas often have little or no backyard, so this pilot program fills an important recreational need for responsible dog owners."

The potential areas were chosen using specific criteria developed by the Department of Parks and Recreation. That included choosing sites where free-running dogs would not contribute to natural or cultural resource damage or displace existing recreational uses. The criteria required that they area be enclosed, either by fences or natural barriers. The sites also were required to be located near urban areas where organized groups of volunteers could maintain the off-leash areas.

Linda McKay, co-founder of San Francisco's Fort Funston Dogwalkers, an advocacy group for off-leash dog parks, served on the State Parks task group and praised the final outcome.

"The creation of off-leash recreational opportunities is a significant step for the California Department of Parks and Recreation," McKay said. "We appreciate the State's acknowledgement of this underserved constituency and applaud Director Areias' leadership in creating a task force to address the concerns of various groups regarding this type of recreation.

"We look forward to working closely with the State to ensure the success of the pilot sites and hope that a positive experience in this initial phase will inspire the State to continue the program and increase the number and variety of sites for off-leash recreation," McKay said.

In setting up the pilot program, the Department's report requires that the off-leash areas be of two acres or more with adequate drainage and equipped with a fence of at least four feet in height. If possible, shade and water would be available for both the dogs and their owners/handlers. Covered trash cans and a plastic bag dispenser station would be located in the areas.

As the process moves forward, there will be more detailed investigation of the areas and opportunities for public input.

Budgets for creation of the off-leash areas would have to be developed and possible funding sources identified. Because of current state budget shortfalls, funding could be a major issue for the off-leash pilot project. The anticipated cost is about \$100,000 for a two-acre, enclosed off-leash area, with the majority of the cost for fencing and walkways.

State Parks would coordinate volunteers in the off-leash areas, but volunteers would be responsible for keeping the areas clean, distributing fliers explaining park rules to site users and assisting with monitoring of the facility.

According to the report, rules for the parks should require that:

- All dogs using the park be licensed and inoculated against rabies.
- No dogs younger than four months of age be allowed.
- All dog feces be immediately removed and properly disposed of by the owner/handlers.
- No more than three dogs per owner/handler be allowed in the facility at one time.
- Owners are responsible for the action of their dogs.

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